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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the recent trend of mayoral influence over and control of education. In a number of major cities, governance has shifted to mayors in the hope that such changes would lead to improved school quality and student achievement, and less scandal in the school systems. Throughout the twentieth century, various reforms led to the model of the elected five- or seven-member school board exercising tight control over the superintendent. That form of governance began to change in the 1990s as mayors argued that cities needed to provide more services, including services to children (i.e., better schools), to attract business. Relying on research literature from studies conducted in a number of cities, this paper draws the following major conclusions: (1) Governance changes must be understood within the broader context of each particular city and the challenges that led to a willingness to alter the top levels of educational control; (2) the way in which mayors are involved varies from low involvement (e.g., trying to influence school-board elections) to high involvement (e.g., gaining formal control over schools); and (3) there is no positive link between these governance shifts and improved instructional practices or outcomes. (Contains 22 references.) (WFA)

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# Mayoral Influence, New Regimes, and Public School Governance

**Michael W. Kirst**

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## Introduction

In recent years, a spate of cities — including Boston, Chicago, and Cleveland — have shifted governance structures to give more control to mayors in the hope that such changes would ultimately lead to improved school quality and student achievement, as well as to diminished scandal and turmoil in the school systems. A closer look at these instances, however, shows that these governance changes have to be understood within the broader context of a particular city, and the particular frustration and challenges that led to the willingness to alter the top levels of educational control. The ways in which mayors have become more engaged with schooling have varied — from low involvement (for example, trying to influence traditional school board elections) to high involvement (gaining formal control over the schools or appointment of school board members). Just as each city is different, so are the impacts (such as can be determined) of governance changes. Most importantly, it is difficult to link these governance shifts to improved instructional practices or outcomes.

## Background

Changes in American big-city school governance frequently focus on reform of a prior reform (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Los Angeles, for example, decentralized central office control somewhat by creating regional superintendents in the 1970s, abolishing them in the 1980s, and then reinstating them in 2000. Reformers at the turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century wanted to overcome the excessive decentralization of ward-based 50-to-100-member school boards, and the corruption of mayoral and city council influence in teacher hiring. Tammany Hall was the symbol of city government in 1900. Consequently, reformers wanted school boards independent of city government, and touted the seven-member school board as the best vehicle for hiring a superintendent who would hire the teachers. One of the prime functions of the executive centralization of a small board and certified administrators was to create a uniform citywide curriculum. Mayors were seen as part of a discredited, inefficient, corrupt regime that did not fit with the industrial model of governance that envisioned the school superintendent as a chief executive officer (Tyack, 1974).

It was not until the 1960s that this 1900-1920 governance pattern was challenged as undemocratic and insufficiently representative of minority groups. A partial reversion to the earlier pattern was instituted. Five- or seven-member school boards were elected from geographic sub-districts of the city and exercised tighter oversight of the superintendent. Unions became omnipresent and major players in board elections, and voluminous collective bargaining agreements grew annually. Administrative decentralization in the 1970s consisted of area superintendents for each of the five or seven districts in a city. New interest groups created a political pluralism representing such interests as handicapped, bilingual, disadvantaged, and gifted pupils. Boards responded to these multiple governance pressures, superintendent turnover accelerated, and the era of the superintendent as administrative chief ended (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). Meanwhile, the conditions of children deteriorated into massive poverty, and big-city school bureaucracies grew even more ineffective and inefficient (Kirst & Bulkley, 2000).

From 1960 to 1995, some large cities like Chicago and Philadelphia preserved a role for the mayor in appointing school board members, but Baltimore was an exception where the mayor continued to exert policy control over the schools. As the performance of city schools stagnated, various governance prescriptions, including sub-area decentralization and weakly implemented school-based management, failed to improve performance. City school board members increasingly saw their role as redistributing school jobs and contracts to benefit residents in the geographic slice of the city that they represented (Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, 1992).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, mayors like John Lindsey of New York City and Jerome Cavanaugh of Detroit stressed that city economies could not be substantially improved without good schools and middle-class students. But these mayors hesitated to seek operational control of the schools because they feared that the school improvement would not be enough to justify their re-election. During the 1980s, new African American mayors such as Harold Washington in Chicago and Coleman Young in Detroit focused in part on redistributing school jobs and services to minority communities (Beinart, 1997).

The 1990s produced a 180-degree reversal in the negative 1900-1920 Tammany Hall mayoral image. Some mayors projected an image of efficient public managers less interested in redistributing jobs to minorities and more interested in improved services. Mayors argued that City Hall needed to provide more integrated and coherent public services, including services for children. Better schools were essential to attracting the middle class and business to the central city. Anti-union Republican state legislatures in Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio were ready to cut the influence of teacher unions and the splintered school boards that faced repeated financial crises. Education reformers stressed that the churn of new policies of each new superintendent created lots of wheel-spinning, but little educational attainment (Hess, 1999).

It is too soon to assess whether mayor control in such cities as Chicago, Cleveland, Harrisburg, and Boston will provide more coherent governance and improved pupil performance. But there are some positive signs. According to polls, citizens in Boston and Chicago are more pleased with mayoral control than the school boards that they replaced. Politicians from all over the United States have visited Chicago to see the new governance model where former city employees have taken over key bureaucratic operations such as personnel and facilities. But in Baltimore, after years of dismal pupil attainment and public dissatisfaction, the mayor (who never lost formal power over the schools) had to surrender control to the state.

In 1999, the author served on Oakland, California Mayor Jerry Brown's commission on education. The commission favored mayoral appointment of all school board members, but not because the commission thought that mayoral control was a panacea. As this report demonstrates, new governance decisions depend largely on judgments about conditions in a specific city context at a particular point in time. The Oakland commission decided that mayoral takeover would stimulate more change than electing two school board members from geographic sub-districts every two years. Moreover, in the fragmented policy context where a recent state audit

indicated the Oakland schools were in a desperate plight, the commission judged that the mayor had a better chance of bringing about new coherent policies. Criticism that mayoral appointment of school boards provides less democracy has justification, but the mayor is also elected, and better known by the voters than school board members. The commission did not have research to support mayoral control, so the appointment issue was subjected to a successful citywide referendum, and in four years Oakland voters can decide whether they want to restore board elections.

We are in an era of experimentation with various forms of mayoral influence and control in public education. Operation of the Chicago schools was taken over by former employees of the city including Paul Vallas, a versatile public administrator, as superintendent. Boston schools superintendent Tom Payzant, a former superintendent in three other cities, is a member of the mayor's cabinet. Boston citizens sometimes take their concerns about the schools to the city council because the school board is advisory and does not react to citizen complaints. Under Michigan law, the Detroit superintendent has statutory powers independent of the Detroit school board. Local school board appointees select the Detroit superintendent, but a representative of state government also sits on the school board. Oakland has a mixed 10-member board — 7 members elected by sub-districts and 3 appointed by the mayor. Perhaps the most successful city-school turnaround, Sacramento, California, has no formal mayoral appointment power, but was galvanized by the election of a mayoral-endorsed slate of candidates.

Each new form of governance depends on a specific city context, and the willingness to make significant changes in governance emerges from an intense and long-gestating desire for a major shake-up in school policy and performance. Looming in the background in several of these cities is the fear of targeted or massive voucher schemes if mayoral action fails to improve the schools. Vouchers and mayoral control co-exist in Cleveland, Ohio, for example, where the ultimately dominant governance pattern is in doubt.

The arguments for mayoral control have strong appeal for some. Proponents justify giving the mayor control of, or an increased role in, the schools because it provides a single point of electoral accountability, greater integration of children's services with schools, and better pupil attainment. Such improvements will spur city economic development, stimulate more middle-class people to live in the city, and forge a closer alliance between city government and businesses. Mayors stress that they are in a better position to integrate citywide services (such as land use, transportation, after-school programs, and children's social services) with the schools. Political losers in this governance shift are district central-office professionals and, most important, the school board.

Opponents to mayoral control assert that a school board appointed by the mayor will result in less democracy because voters have fewer electoral choices and cannot vote for a board member from their section of the city. An Institute for Educational Leadership study found that electing school boards by sub-districts changed the role and behavior of school board members (Danzberger et al., 1992). Boards became

more attentive to the particular needs of certain geographical sections of their cities. The citywide education policy perspective lessened, and board concern with geographic redistribution of jobs, contacts, and constituent services grew. Minority representation on school boards, however, increased when citywide selection was changed to geographic districts. Hispanic groups in the West, for example, have strongly supported sub-district board elections in order to increase representation of minority groups on school boards. Whether the alleged policy benefits of mayoral control are worth the loss of better geographic representation cannot be decided by general theories, but should be submitted to the local electorate.

The 1900-1920 movement to centralize school governance was justified in part by a perception that a citywide curriculum was needed to offset multi-lingual approaches (Tyack, 1974). This perceived need for centralization reoccurred in 1990 when city reading scores fell extremely low. Proponents hoped that increasing centralization through mayoral appointment would lead to a more intense and coordinated focus on reading in big cities. Again, we see the reform of an earlier reform. It was the alleged excessive centralization of curriculum in city schools that during the 1960s led in part to the call for urban decentralization to better meet the needs of diverse pupils (Hannaway & Carnoy, 1993).

Governance changes, in short, are a way to maximize certain conflicting values and policies over others. As values and needs change, governance revisions such as mayoral control and decentralization will recycle. Moreover, entirely new governance forms (for example, vouchers and contracting with private firms to run public schools) might be emphasized in the future. Will any of these governance alterations change classroom instruction, attract quality teachers, and improve pupil performance? And if they do, what is the connection between governance structure and improved classroom instruction? This report provides an overview of recent mayoral-governance changes as a prelude to answering these questions in a few years.

## Every City is Different

Mayors of many cities are using different approaches to increase their influence over the public schools. Some mayors, such as those in Akron, Ohio and West Sacramento, California, have only gone so far as to threaten takeover unless certain school policies change. Other mayors, as in Chicago and Boston, have taken over their school systems and gotten involved in major decisions affecting the school systems. In cities like San Francisco, the mayor has not sought direct control, but has strengthened the liaison function between the schools and the mayor's office. San Francisco's mayor hired Ramon Cortines, the former superintendent of New York City and San Francisco, to perform this function.

The striking thing about the growth of mayoral influence over schools is the distinctiveness of each city. There are no established patterns; form, function, and operation of mayoral influence are all over the map. These differences reflect diverse city contexts, local political cultures, interest group structures, state/local relations, legal basis of city government, historical school governance structures, and other specific city characteristics. The personalities and ambitions of individual mayors are also important. Mayor Tom Menino of Boston,

for example, featured his school role in his successful re-election campaign.

The array of mayoral interventions is presented below, ranging from low to high influence and providing specific examples. Following presentation of the array, some interesting city impacts are examined in greater depth.

## Low Mayoral Influence

Mayors have threatened to take over schools, but pulled back when school policy changed in Akron, Ohio and West Sacramento, California. Mayors in Los Angeles and Sacramento, California endorsed slates of school board candidates and provided substantial campaign money and workers for their board choices, but they did not seek to overthrow the school boards' powers or to appoint board members.

## Low-Moderate Mayoral Influence

Mayors appoint some school board members, but not a majority of the board. Voters in Oakland, California approved a city charter amendment enlarging the school board from 7 to 10 members, and allowing Mayor Jerry Brown to appoint 3 members. The mayor's appointees formed a minority voting bloc that opposed the superintendent more often than the elected members. The Oakland mayor wanted to appoint the entire school board, but could not obtain city council approval for more than 3 of the 10 members. Of the three candidates endorsed by the mayor, only two were successful.

Until recently, the mayor of Baltimore, Maryland appointed all school board members because Baltimore never had an elected school board. However, in 1997, Baltimore received $230 million in state aid and, in return, the mayor lost his prerogative to appoint all members of the board of education. In its place, the mayor and governor jointly appointed a new nine-member board of commissioners, based on a nominating slate provided by the State Board of Education. The following affiliations and expertise were required of the new board of commissioners: at least four commissioners had to have a high level of expertise in a large business, non-profit, or governmental entity; at least three had to have a high level of knowledge and expertise in education; at least one commissioner had to be a parent of a student enrolled in the district; and at least one commissioner had to have knowledge or experience in educating children with disabilities. The new board of commissioners (unlike the old board which had been appointed by and controlled by one individual) is vested with full authority and responsibility for running the school system. In addition, a 14-member parent and community advisory board was formed to solicit parental input and involvement (Cibulka, 2001). The Baltimore mayor has selected people with established credentials to serve on the new board of commissioners, including an education professor, a facilities management expert, and two other academics.

After Anthony Williams was elected mayor of Washington, DC in 1998, he sought more control over school policy by proposing that he would appoint all 11 school board members. As in Oakland, the city council resisted this, arguing in favor of more electoral representation. The parties compromised by creating a hybrid nine-member board — four selected by the mayor, four elected from new geographic districts, and the president elected in a citywide referendum. District voters can revisit the

governance structure through a referendum to be held after four years (Cibulka, 2001).

The mayor of New York City currently appoints two members and the city's five borough presidents each appoint one member to the citywide school board. Newly elected Mayor Michael Bloomberg has said he will lobby state legislators to abolish the board and have the schools operated by a commissioner of education who would report directly to the mayor.

## Moderate Mayoral Influence

The Detroit mayor appoints six members and the governor appoints one member to the city's school board. In some decisions, however, the governor's choice has veto power over the mayor's six appointees. For example, the governor's representative vetoed first choice of Mayor Dennis Archer's appointees for superintendent. But the Detroit board does little other than choose the superintendent, approve the superintendent's appointees, and approve the annual school improvement plans. The mayor's deputy press secretary has said, "The mayor has no direct involvement in the schools...he has enough on his plate trying to run the 10th largest city" (Community Renewal Society, 2001, p. 12). In addition, a Michigan law has terminated the Detroit principals' union in order to provide the superintendent with more flexibility.

The Cleveland mayor, under state legislation, appoints the school board and the district's chief executive officer (CEO). After 30 months, however, the mayor can fire the CEO, but only with concurrence of the board he appointed. Mayor Michael White has chosen not to get visibly involved in school policy or operations. Mayor White's relationship with CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett is similar to the relationship between a non-executive chairman and a CEO in private business (Community Renewal Society, 2001, p. 6). Mayor White has been most active in improving facilities, but he meets infrequently with the school board. He is kept informed, but has chosen to let CEO Byrd-Bennett be the public leader. Both mayoral candidates in the 2001 election supported the existing system, but in 2002 Cleveland voters will have to decide whether or not to reauthorize mayoral control.

Philadelphia moved to the high-influence category after the voters approved a 2000 charter initiative enabling the mayor to appoint all school board members at one time. Philadelphia's previous mayor, Ed Rendell, could appoint board members in staggered terms, and he chose to defer to his choice for superintendent on matters of education policy and operational decisions. Current Philadelphia Mayor John Street has appointed a person in his office to follow school policy closely and to work with the board-appointed CEO. Mayor Street has been able to increase the number of charter schools in Philadelphia (serving 6.5% of total enrollment in 2001) despite resistance from the teachers' union. A huge district deficit in 2001 forced Mayor Street to negotiate with the state to provide more aid to Philadelphia schools in exchange for greater state policy control. The governor hired the for-profit Edison Schools to rethink governance and school improvement. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* described the state proposal this way:

*Governor Schweiker's Philadelphia plan would transfer control of the school system from local officials to his appointees, who would then put its management in the hands*

*of a private corporation — almost certainly the for-profit Edison. Another seismic proposal: turning over the 60 lowest-achieving schools to partnerships of community groups or universities and private school-management firms.*

*The governor and other proponents of the plan have cast it as a prototype for urban education reform in the 21st century, one that opens new opportunities for community leadership of the schools. An angry Mayor Street, on the other hand, has called it "fantasyland" and "unacceptable."*

*If no agreement is reached, a board — with four of five members named by the governor — would control the district for the next five years and impose his original plan ("Lessons from School Takeovers," 2001).*

In response to Mayor Street's objections, the governor agreed to drop Edison's central management of the system, but insisted on district governance by a five-member School Reform Commission, with three members appointed by the governor and two appointed by the mayor. A super majority of four is needed for many key decisions, including selection of the district CEO, adoption of the Commission's by-laws, selection of an independent evaluator, borrowing of money, and appointment of a general counsel. In effect, the mayor's two appointees have veto power over these matters.

## High Mayoral Influence

The 1995 Chicago governance changes granting an enhanced role to the mayor were layered over reforms instituted in 1988. The earlier reforms, which were supported by state Democrats and civic activists, shifted power from the district to Local School Councils that appointed principals and allocated significant discretionary money at each school. The mayor's ability to appoint the city's school board was decreased under the 1988 legislation. The impetus for decentralization was not a desire to increase the influence of educators. Shipps (2000) says, "Educators were blamed for the problems and their discretion curtailed." Rather, the legislation was designed to enhance the influence of parents and community members.

While the 1988 reforms pushed control toward the schools, the 1995 legislation shifted power up the ladder to the mayor. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley favored this shift, but did not pursue it publicly as the previous mayor had. Led by Republican state legislators, the 1995 governance change emphasized centralizing political accountability with the mayor, adding the new structure on top of the 1988 reform, rather than replacing it.

The 1995 changes gave the Chicago mayor more authority than any mayor since before the Progressive Era, effectively turning the public education system into a department of city government (Shipps, 2000). The 1995 legislation eliminated the school board nominating committee, which had effectively minimized the mayor's ability to select school board members, and replaced the traditional board with a corporate-style board. Under the new structure, only one of five board members was to focus on education (the chief education officer), and there was a CEO, rather than a superintendent. The legislation limited the rights of unions to strike, and redefined a large number of issues as non-bargainable. The 1995 legislation enabled Chicago to contract for many building repairs, services, and

purchases instead of employing numerous union personnel as under the old system.

Mayoral appointment of the school board in Boston began in 1991. In 1996, Mayor Menino made his choice for superintendent, former San Diego Superintendent Tom Payzant, a member of his cabinet. The school board had been reduced to an advisory role, and the Mayor urged voters to hold him accountable for school performance. A 1996 referendum to retain the mayoral-appointed board was supported by 70% of Boston's voters, with only African American communities opposed. Board meetings were generally brief and poorly attended, while the real decisions were made by the superintendent and mayor. Mayor Menino acknowledged that the appointed board had not been accessible to public concerns, but said he and the superintendent would attend more to this function (Yee, 2000).

## Impact of Mayoral Control

It is not possible to link many changes in school policy and practice to changes in governance. Some major trends can be attributed in part to mayoral intervention, although there is no apparent relationship between level (low, moderate, or high) of mayoral influence and the impact on schools. For example, Mayor Joe Serna of Sacramento (*low influence*) recruited, financed, and supported a slate of school board candidates, but left them alone to do their jobs. *Education Week* reported the following results:

*Many in California's capital city of 369,000 credit Mr. Serna, who died of cancer November 7, 2001, for pushing changes that now have more children reading at earlier ages, more school buildings scheduled for repair, and more politicians and parents backing an urban school system that was once considered a total loss.*

*In the past year, the 52,000-student district's test scores in elementary-age reading and math have shown dramatic increases that would be the envy of any school system. A focused, determined school board, with a majority of members who were backed and supported by Mayor Serna, has ended the bickering and deadlock that plagued the district's governance for years. The public has shown renewed confidence and interest in the schools by passing, in October, the district's first bond measure for school repairs in more than 20 years.*

*And despite some criticism of how the changes are being carried out, Sacramento is being looked at nationwide as a model of urban school success ("Sacramento Mayor's Legacy," 2000).*

In addition, the Sacramento school board elevated the deputy superintendent to the top job, and he focused on changing instruction through the Open Court standardized reading program.

Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan (*low influence*) used a school board electoral strategy that raised $2 million for a successful election. The mayor's reform board recruited former Colorado Governor Roy Romer to be superintendent. Romer re-centralized some instructional policy and, like Sacramento, installed Open Court as the standard reading program. The Los Angeles results on the state test (Stanford-9) have not been as impressive as Sacramento's to date, but Superintendent Romer has won the support of the *Los Angeles Times*. Mayor Riordan also used the influence of his office to speed approval of new school construction in this rapidly growing district.

Among the *moderately influential* mayors, Cleveland's Mayor White actively promoted the successful $1.4 billion 2001 referendum to replace aging roofs, faulty wiring, rotted windows, and other chronic school building problems. Cleveland political observers contend that the voter support needed to upgrade the schools (average age of 51 years) was generated in part by increased public confidence in the new CEO, Barbara Byrd-Bennett. In 1999, Byrd-Bennett announced instructional reforms and accountability changes that centralized the system and de-emphasized past policies to provide parents with greater school site influence (Ryan, 2001). The impact of her reforms is unclear, but Byrd-Bennett is so popular that mayoral candidates hoping to replace Mayor White in 2001 sought her endorsement.

Mayors perhaps have the least impact where the mayor's powers are least clear, as in Oakland and Detroit. In Oakland (*low-moderate influence*), Mayor Jerry Brown has focused more on charter schools; his three mayoral appointees have not coalesced with the seven elected board members and their appointed superintendent. The new superintendent in Detroit has a lot of formal power, but has not sought a close relationship with city government, perhaps because the mayor's term expired in January 2002. The Washington, DC school system has made progress in restoring public confidence under the leadership of experienced superintendent Paul Vance, who once headed the large nearby suburban system in Montgomery County, Maryland (Cibulka, 2001).

The state-ordered demise of the Detroit school board was viewed by city voters as usurpation without any local legitimacy (Gewertz, 2000). Despite media support for the new regime (*low-moderate influence*), public opinion polls have indicated that voters, under the referendum allowed by the state law, want to return to an elected board in 2003. The last president of the Detroit school board was indicted on corruption charges. The new superintendent has managed to build more schools and make badly needed repairs, but the elected board could not agree on how much to spend of the $1.3 billion bond approved in 1993. Both mayoral candidates supported the new superintendent who has two more years to make a bigger impact (D. Plank, interview, November 2001).

The cases of Boston and Chicago (*high influence*) have received the most academic scrutiny. In both cities, the primary movers behind the governance changes granting more power to the mayors were the business community, the mayor (especially in Boston), and state legislators. Local groups, such as community activists and minority group representatives, were not directly involved; educator organizations including the teacher unions were either peripheral to the debate or opposed to the change.

The proponents of the governance changes in Boston and Chicago had certain similar goals, but also some important differences. There was a strong emphasis in Chicago on improving the efficiency of the public schools, particularly the fiscal efficiency of the district. Shipps (2000) notes that the 1995 governance changes were a continuation of longstanding efforts to improve efficiency and restructure accountability. This emphasis reflected the interests of the Chicago business community. Improved efficiency was a factor in Boston, but not as central as the issues of standards and curriculum (Yee, 2000).

The role and purpose of the district leader was another difference between the reforms in these two cities. Reflecting the focus on efficiency, the Chicago Public Schools would be led by a business-style CEO, rather than a traditional superintendent. In contrast, the Boston mayor wanted a strong educator-leader at the head of the school system. Boston's Mayor Menino wanted to be held accountable for the state of the Boston Public Schools, and he wanted to be directly involved in the district's operations. He wanted to place a strong superintendent who would be a part of the mayor's cabinet, and who would not have to contend with the many demands of an elected School Committee. The intentions of those who initiated the governance changes in Chicago and Boston were reflected in their implementation, especially in the interests and styles of the new leaders chosen with strong mayoral input.

The governance changes that shifted power toward the Chicago and Boston mayors set the stage for substantial alterations within these two school systems. The mayors and their chosen leaders took advantage of the new structural changes to implement substantive reforms. Paul Vallas, former Chicago budget director, assumed the new position of CEO of the Chicago Public Schools. The selection of Vallas reflected the business community's interest in a leader from outside traditional public education. Vallas believed that clear accountability, in combination with running the district more like a business, would lead to an improved organization. In this top-down change model, management creates the vision and defines clear sanctions for individuals and schools that fail to progress toward that vision (Shipps, 2000).

The selection of Tom Payzant as superintendent of the Boston schools was a far more traditional choice for district leader. His selection reflected Mayor Menino's interest in a professional educator who would avoid, to some extent, the political issues that consumed much of the time of previous superintendents. Payzant's approach was within the framework of traditional education reform; his primary focus reflected a professional education model involving higher standards and capacity-building (Yee, 2000).

The new governance structures in Chicago and Boston, in combination with the mayors and district leaders who sought to improve the school systems, resulted in changes that reflected the different intentions of those who sought the new structures. In both cities, there were shifts in the practical operations of the district and in the overall message about teaching and learning sent by the mayors and the education leaders.

Some very visible and practical changes occurred in the first years following the 1995 reform in Chicago. For the first time in years, the school district budget appeared to be in reasonable shape. This change may have been due in part to Mayor Daley's willingness to support the schools through property tax increases and funds diverted from other parts of the city budget. In addition, there was relative labor peace in the Chicago Public Schools. There has not been a strike since the governance changes took place.

Some major changes occurred following the arrival of former city budget director Vallas at the district's central office. Roughly 100 former City Hall employees came to work in the central office, displacing more traditional

education staff. In addition to the CEO, the leadership of the Chicago school district was now largely from the business sector, rather than from education. School-site councils still exist at all the Chicago public schools, but their influence has been reduced; new central office leaders have increased their role in the operation of the schools. The combination of no budget crises, no strikes, and generally positive public opinion of the reforms instituted by Vallas has improved the legitimacy of the school system over the last several years (Shipps, 2000.)

The direct impact of the changes in the governance structure of the Boston Public Schools has not been as marked as in Chicago. The most notable change was the elimination of the bitter battles within the school committee and between the committee and the mayor — a logical outcome of having an appointed rather than elected school committee. The committee included allies first of then-Mayor Raymond Flynn, and later of Mayor Menino. Many committee members had close ties to the business community. As in Chicago, labor relations, particularly with the teachers' union, improved in the years following the governance change. Also similar to Chicago, some of the most blatant budget problems disappeared in Boston. The Boston mayor has always influenced *how much* money is spent by the public school system, but the new governance changes allowed the mayor also to influence *how* the funds were spent. Unlike in Chicago, however, there were no dramatic changes in the structure or staffing of the district's central office, and no transfer of city employees to key positions in the district's central office (Yee, 2000). But Mayor Menino has provided a clear focus for public accountability by saying to the electorate that he wants to be judged for election by school improvement (Yee, 2000).

The style and substance of the education reforms taking place within these governance changes are quite different in the two cities. The overall focus in Chicago has been on accountability, defined largely by test scores and taking action where schools and students do not meet predefined goals. According to Shipps, the emphasis has been on strong and immediate sanctions for principals of schools that did not meet performance goals set by CEO Vallas. This was especially true for schools whose students fell into the bottom 25% of test scores in the district; these schools faced high-stakes consequences such as probation and reconstitution. For students, there were new and high-stakes repercussions for low-test scores as well. The most public example was Vallas's call to end social promotion. Students who did not meet required performance levels at certain grades faced mandatory summer school and generally would not be promoted if their test scores did not rise adequately by the end of the summer session.

These accountability measures mostly focused on minimal standards and improving the educational outcomes of low-performing students in Chicago's schools, but there were also changes affecting students at the upper end of the performance spectrum. For example, Vallas supported the creation and expansion of alternatives, including magnet schools, charter schools, and accelerated programs such as International Baccalaureate options. In addition to efforts removing "troublesome or slow-learning students" from regular public schools to other settings such as transition centers and alternative high schools, there was a push

for more "upper-end" options linked to the goal of attracting middle-class families back to the Chicago Public Schools.

Overall, Vallas based his efforts on two assumptions. First was the assumption that much of the capacity needed to improve performance was already available within the public school system, but incentives and sanctions were necessary to elicit this pre-existing capacity. Thus, there has been less emphasis on building additional capacity in Chicago than in other districts, such as Boston. The second assumption was that test scores, while not a perfect measure, were the most logical means of assessing progress in providing quality education. However, when test scores maintained a plateau in 2001, Mayor Daley decided Vallas had done all he could do to improve test scores, and forced him and the board president out. Accountable to the electorate for major changes in policy and personnel, the mayor thought the district needed to supplement its get-tough accountability policy. The new Chicago superintendent is searching for better instructional strategies with greater impact.

*In November 2001, the Illinois State Board of Education included three-fourths of the state's elementary schools on its academic Early Warning List, based on state assessment scores. Sixty-seven of Chicago's 76 high schools failed the Eleventh Grade Prairie State Achievement Exam. Still, while statewide scores remained flat, Chicago's overall state test scores rose slightly and Mayor Daley's new magnet schools had some of the highest scores in the state. Five of the state's top 10 elementary schools were in Chicago, but so were 21 of the state's bottom 25 schools. Chicago's chief accountability officer defended the magnet schools, "If we did not have these [magnet] programs, we would probably lose these kids to private and parochial schools" (Banchero, Olszewski, & Dougherty, 2001).*

The style of the education reforms undertaken in Boston arose from a similar governance change, but the experience was quite different from Chicago. Former Mayor Flynn and Superintendent Lois Harrison-Jones were the first leaders to experience the mayorally appointed school committee, but the major changes largely resulted from the actions of Mayor Menino and Superintendent Payzant. In contrast with Chicago's CEO Vallas who was an education outsider, Payzant was very much the professional superintendent who wanted to work primarily within existing structures. Vallas relied heavily on the existing capacity within the school system; Payzant focused on increasing capacity. According to Yee (2000), "Payzant emphasized his long-term commitment to steady, resolute progress through staff training, new materials, and high standards."

Improvement strategies employed by Payzant included raising standards, leadership development, whole-school change, and developing a reorganization plan focused on student performance. His focus on teaching and learning relied to some extent on professional norms, rather than sanctions, as a means of improving performance. Unlike Chicago under Vallas, there has been little change in the tenure of administrators or teachers in Boston, and no talk of school-site reconstitution. Payzant introduced school report cards that included Stanford-9 test results. Payzant replaced the district's standardized test with the Stanford-9 because he believed it better reflected the district's new standards that emphasized higher-order skills.

The new governance frameworks in Boston and Chicago set similar stages for educational reform, but the leaders in these two cities used the expanded role of the mayor to make quite different changes. Both cities had strong mayors and sufficiently large problems in their schools that the state legislatures (and, the individual voters in Boston) were motivated to enact major structural changes. The actual regime change occurred, however, when the mayors, school leaders, and others used the governance changes to significantly alter the administrative and educational practices of the district leadership, and through these alterations, change the practices of educators in the schools.

The different directions taken by Boston and by Chicago leaders were not just whims of the individual mayors and school district chiefs. To some extent the different directions reflected the historical political culture and the desires of powerful constituencies within these cities and states. The regime changes particularly reflected the different emphases of the business communities in Boston and Chicago. Selection of a business-style leader like Vallas to lead the Chicago school system was not surprising given the role of the business community and Republican legislative leaders in initiating the 1995 reform. The focus on management issues in Chicago is consistent with the interests of its business community. The Boston business community, however, tended to focus more on issues of school quality, so an experienced superintendent was a more acceptable choice.

The regime changes in both cities are still relatively new. But there is little indication that there will be a return, at least not in the near future, to the previous governance structures. It is more likely there will be ongoing tinkering within the present regimes than major structural changes.

Wong and Shen (2001) have compared the effects of mayoral takeover in Boston and Chicago with state takeover in Lawrence, Massachusetts and Compton, California. They concluded that mayoral takeover had a positive impact on pupil achievement:

*First, mayoral takeover is linked to increases in student achievement at the elementary grades. Second, gains in achievement are especially large for the lowest-performing schools, suggesting that mayoral takeovers involve a special focus on these failing schools. Third, mayoral takeover seems less effective for the upper grades, where the cumulative effects of many years of poor schooling are not easily reversible. Fourth, when state takeovers produce administrative and political turmoil, student achievement suffers. After a period of adjustment, however, state takeovers may also be able to produce positive achievement gains.*

Wong and Shen (2001) write that mayoral control had other attributes:

*Our analysis of city and state takeovers suggests the following conclusions. First, there are significant differences between mayoral takeover and state takeovers, and mayoral takeovers appear to be more productive in terms of academic improvement. Mayoral takeovers may make a significant impact on the lowest-performing schools. Second, takeovers may also produce more efficient financial and administrative management, and in the case of mayoral takeover, lead to a broadening of management expertise. Third, both city and state takeovers bring with them a heavy emphasis on academic accountability, and mayoral takeovers are more likely to utilize additional tests beyond state-mandated exams.*

**Table 1. Outcomes in Mayor-controlled School Districts**

| Outcome | Boston | Chicago | Philadelphia |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aligned curriculum, tests, professional development, and rewards/penalties | Moderate | Low | Low |
| Political support of district reforms | High | High | Low |
| Improved coordination of city and school services | Slight | Slight | None |
| Increased turnover among: | | | |
| Teachers | Moderate | Moderate | High |
| Principals | High | High | High |
| Improved test scores: | | | |
| Elementary | Slight | Moderate | Moderate |
| Secondary | No | No | No |
| Reduced gap between white and minority scores | No | No | No |

*Source: L. Cuban and M. Usdan. (2002). Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Getting Good Schools in Six Cities. New York: Teachers College Press.*

## The Six-City Study

Research scholars have conducted case studies of six cities[1] that used mayoral control or school boards that appointed unconventional superintendents who had no prior experience in education administration (Cuban & Usdan, 2002). In general, under mayoral control they found improvement over the previous regime of school boards, but little evidence of reaching higher goals such as widespread instructional improvement in classrooms. The researchers did find "partial evidence of increased city and school coordination," but not at the level that mayoral-control advocates hoped would take place. An overview of the findings for the three mayoral-control cities is presented in Table 1.

The six-city study found that Boston was making progress in aligning the various elements of its systemic strategy to support principals and teachers in helping students to improve academic performance, but Chicago and Philadelphia were not. Support from

[1] *These cities were Chicago, Boston, San Diego, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.*

business, media, and elites were strongly favorable of mayoral actions in Boston and Chicago. But, as Cuban and Usdan (2002) note:

*Although the Chicago and Philadelphia cases offer instances of CEOs decisively acting in determining budgets, waiving rules, and slicing through bureaucratic layers, the accumulated evidence for the two cities counter civic and business leaders' deep wish to connect governance changes and better management to improved student outcomes.*

Cuban and Usdan applaud Boston for its leadership stability in extending Superintendent Payzant's contract from 1996 to 2005. They contend that a school without broader linkages to city, community, and private out-of-school services has little chance of success.

## Conclusion

There is no political majority urging return to school board-dominated regimes in any of the cities that moved toward greater mayoral influence over the schools. Boston voters have reauthorized mayoral control in Boston, and the Illinois legislature extended the Chicago mayor's regime for another three years. Sacramento does not regret former Mayor Serna's campaign for a new board. Detroit has seen the president of its prior school board indicted for corruption. Still, the impact of enhanced mayoral influence on instruction remains tenuous and unclear (Rich, 1996). Mayors are able to help balance the budget, improve buildings, and increase school supplies, but intervention in the classroom is more difficult. The most notable trend in these cities, however, is the diversity of the governance arrangements and how local context and civic culture determine whatever outcomes ensue (Stone, 1998). While some mayors got involved in the details of school management, others provided their appointed superintendents wide discretion in running the schools. Increased centralized control of education policy was a consistent trend among these districts; there was no district where mayoral influence was primarily oriented to decentralizing policymaking to the schools.

Mayor Menino of Boston and Mayor Daley of Chicago sought to become the central symbol of school accountability, while Detroit Mayor Archer and Cleveland Mayor White preferred to stay behind the scenes and have the superintendent the focus of accountability. Several mayoral regimes need to be reauthorized by the voters in the next five years. These elections will determine in large part whether 1995-2001 was just another quick cycle of mayoral influence, or a more lasting governance change (Boyd and Cibulka, 2002). Even if these new regimes are extended, there are limits to mayoral influence and control:

*In other words, mayoral control of urban schools is merely one reform strategy. Changing governance arrangements clearly can make a difference in the way urban public school systems function, but such a strategy requires the right combination of ingredients — committed and skilled leadership by the mayor, willingness to use scarce resources, a stable coalition of supporters, appropriate education policies, and a cadre of competent, committed professionals to implement the reforms (Cibulka, 2001, p. 35).*

State domination of governance, where mayors play a secondary role to the state as in Philadelphia and

Baltimore, is one possibility for more urban districts. Mayors may have to demonstrate increases in pupil attainment and financial stability in order to ward off state intervention. The mayors of Baltimore and Philadelphia traded increased state aid for increased state control, so city economic growth may be a crucial factor. Slow-growing city economies will reduce local tax revenues and lead to calls for financial bail-outs by the states. States, however, seem less inclined to provide more money without a greater governance role, including state appointment of board members.

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